

9711
THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS TO MOURN FOR
NATIONAL SINS.

A
S E R M O N.

Preached on

THURSDAY, February 26. 1778.

THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A GENERAL FAST.

K.
By JOSEPH JOHNSTON,
MINISTER of the GOSPEL in EDINBURGH.

SECOND EDITION.

JEREM. ix. 1. — *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears,
that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.*

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED BY BAYNE AND MENNONS.

M.DCC.LXXVIII.

FOR THE CENTRAL TO NORTH

S. E. R. H. O. M.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1833

THE DAY AND A GENERAL

JOHN HONSTON

MINISTER OF THE COURT OF COMMONS



SECOND EDITION

1833

Printed by J. G. & J. H. B. at the British Museum

W. H. & J. H. B. at the British Museum
LONDON: W. H. & J. H. B. at the British Museum

A

S E R M O N.

EZEKIEL ix. 4.

And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

EVERY one who is convinced of the truth of religion, and especially they who are affected with the love of it, must be deeply concerned when men despise it, and do not live under the influence of its precepts. To forget God, and lightly to esteem the Rock of their Salvation, seems to have been the prevailing temper of the Jews, before the just judgments of God came upon them. The Lord however, (for his mercy endureth for ever) did not leave himself

himself without a witness; but raised up and commissioned Ezekiel, this great prophet, to testify against their sins, and warn them of their danger. Deeply affected with their sin, and the judgments of God, the natural consequence of it, he spared no pains to reclaim them: But their violence and outrage obliged the preacher to give over his faithful admonitions, and leave them to that severe sermon which the king of Babylon's army should preach to them in the destruction of both city and temple. Being, however, assisted in an extraordinary manner by the spirit of God, he directed those, who in the integrity of their heart, inquired after their duty: He encouraged the handful of godly ones, who, though innocent, were made sharers of the general calamity, and carried captive to Babylon. He comforted them with the hopes of deliverance, or with what was infinitely better, the divine favour and assistance to bear the hardest sufferings. The words of the text point out the security of the godly, and the certain destruction of the wicked; "And the Lord said unto him," viz. to Jesus, the angel of the covenant, the man cloathed with linen, an emblem of peace,

"Go

“ Go through the midst of the city, thro’
 “ the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark
 “ upon the foreheads of the men that sigh,
 “ and that cry for all the abominations that
 “ be done in the midst thereof.”

In discoursing upon this affecting subject, it is proposed to point out some of those leading vices for which the people of God did mourn, and for which the judgments of heaven came upon the Jews.

2dly, To shew that it is the duty of all the servants of Jesus Christ to bear witness against the sins, and mourn for the abominations of their own times.

3dly, That such a conduct is acceptable to God.

Lastly, That it is the best mean of deliverance from public calamities.

1. It was proposed to lay before you a short view of those leading vices for which divine vengeance came upon the Jews; and may that same spirit which actuateth the children of God in every age, assist in the attempt, and influence all of us, where we find their sins and ours similar, to take warning, repent and turn unto the Lord, not feignedly, but with the whole heart.

1st, They were notoriously guilty in regard to the first table of the law: They
 most

most ungratefully forgot God their maker, and wantonly forsook the Rock of their Salvation : They called in question the power and goodness of that God who dried up the Red Sea before them ; who led them through the wilderness by the cloud of his presence ; who made mighty kings and great armies to fly before them : They loathed angels food, and hungered after the sumptuous fare of Egypt : They chafed rather to return back into bondage under the direction of the golden calf, than to be conducted to a Canaan of liberty by Jehovah the God of heaven. The heathen idolatry they were fond of to distraction ; and said to the works of their own hands, *These be thy gods, O Israel.* They imitated the worst of idolaters, the Phenicians and Egyptians, among whom they had been slaves. This is evident from that vision which Ezekiel saw when the Lord brought him into the inner court of the Lord's house : " Behold," saith he, " at the door
 " of the temple of the Lord, between the
 " porch and the altar, were about five and
 " twenty men with their backs toward the
 " temple of the Lord, and their faces toward
 " the east, and they worshipped the sun."

• This

This was a direct violation of the most just law of God, in which they were forbidden to worship or bow down to any similitude or figure upon earth, or to lift up their eyes to pay divine honours to the sun or stars: But alas! the knowledge of the divine law served only to improve their wickedness, and the light which was in them being darkened, they became sevenfold more the children of darkness than the unenlightened nations around them.

Had this been only amongst the lowest of the people, the rude and the ignorant, in that case there would have been some shadow of excuse, because in general the very low and illiterate part of mankind is more abandoned in every country. But this was so far from being the present case, that it was the ancients of the house of Israel, those from whom better things might have been expected, and from whom the Spirit of God claimed higher improvements; * “I will get me unto the great men,” saith the prophet, “and will speak unto them, for they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God.” But these have altogether

* Jeremiah v. 5.

ther broken the yoke, and burst the bonds. According to their knowledge and influence in the world, they were so much the more obstinate. Those very princes and nobles, who should have been an example of piety towards God, and the guardians of true religion, ruined the common people by their bad example: They became votaries of idols, and the worst of rebels against the God of Israel.

But tho' idolatry of this kind cannot be charged upon us, yet human nature remains uncured, and vice hath only taken a different channel. The age is not idolatrous, but it abounds in Atheism, or with what is not much better, Deism. The number of those, who deny all natural as well as all revealed religion, is very great; and because human nature, separated from the divine, is weak and unable to support itself, they strain every nerve to gain proselytes to their cause, in order to fortify themselves against God and their own conscience.

What pains do these workers of iniquity take to paint vice in the amiable habit of virtue? How do they extol her charms? What baits do they throw out to catch the simple? and the souls of righteous men,
which

which they cannot gain by gentler methods, they endeavour to storm. They leave no stone unturned to extinguish all difference between good and evil, and to make men dissolute: They tell them, for a man to have a tender conscience, an awful sense of divine omniscience, and a belief of a future judgment, is to be a slave to the prejudice of education. If once a man would break through these, and make use of his native freedom, he would no longer be confined by those scar-crows, and idle tales of nurses and mothers, and priests. These champions of hell would make us believe, that free-thinking, and to speak and act without controul, is the perfection of human nature, and none but fools deny themselves that privilege.

They say, the law of reason, and the precepts of the gospel, are only calculated for those who have not seen the world: Such niceties and rules are only for those who have lived all their days at home, whose ideas are as confined as their travels: But if a man would rise in the world, he should throw off all these whims; improve his advantages, acquire riches, climb up to honours and preferments by every method,

without regard to the dictates of reason or conscience. Were men of this sad character, confined to a corner, or were they the lowest of the people, the judgments of God would be less alarming ; but alas ! it is not the poor who have not known the way of the Lord, nor the judgments of their God, but those of higher ranks, and of the finest talents.

Tell me ye who fear God, Is it not a judgment upon a land when her leaders cause her to err ? When they prostitute the finest natural parts, the best gifts, the highest improvements of science, to blaspheme God, and corrupt the morals of men. How many elaborate volumns, since the beginning of the last century, have come into the world, intentionally written to reproach the gospel of Christ, to ridicule the mysteries of our divine religion, and to provoke the spirit of God : When judges are extortioners, and nobles oppressors ; when they join house to house, lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone upon the earth, (I mention the latter, because they are linked in one chain with the former), against such there is a woe pronounced ; “ For their sakes the land doth
 “ mourn,

“mourn, and many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant.” Let such know, if there is a time to sin, and to dare divine justice, there must be a time for punishment.

If God is governor and judge of the world, there must be room for the display of his perfections at a future bar. If his own children are making progress from grace to glory, and advancing to the joyful period, when their faith shall be changed into vision, the others, in their course of sinning, become ripe for judgment.

Another leading crime charged upon the Jews before the judgments of God came upon them, was, the scandalous lives of their priests and prophets: They made it their chief concern to please men instead of approving themselves unto the living God. Upon the first transgression of the divine law all intercourse between heaven and earth was shut up: The glorious God became inaccessible to sinful man; a mediator and an atonement therefore became necessary, otherwise man must have perished for ever. Jesus Christ the son of God, condescended to become both the one and the other: This is most obvious from the words of

of

of the apostle Paul to Timothy, * “ For
 “ there is one God and one mediator be-
 “ tween God and man, the man Christ
 “ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all,
 “ to be testified in due time.” But as it
 did not consist with the plan of infinite
 wisdom that the son of God should imme-
 diately appear upon earth, he behoved to
 be represented to the faith of his own peo-
 ple, as the lamb of God slain from the
 foundation of the world ; because without
 the shedding of blood there could be no
 hope of remission, no faith in God, guilt
 and misery having made such deep impres-
 sions upon the soul of man, without those
 sensible symbols and representations of the
 atonement to be made in due time by Je-
 sus Christ, that faith and hope could ne-
 ver have been kept alive. Besides this,
 all those predictions relative to the incar-
 nation of the son of God, his sufferings,
 death, resurrection, and ascension into hea-
 ven, behoved to be fully accomplished
 before Jesus himself should appear in per-
 son. It was necessary then, that one or
 more of his ministers, as their imperfect
 state, and his glorious person did require,
 should

* 1 Epistle, ii. 5, 6.

should represent him upon earth. Accordingly God commanded Moses to consecrate and set apart Aaron and his sons to represent the son of God, to come near unto the Lord, and to minister in holy things. You see then their office was most sacred, and that the greatest circumspection and holiness in heart and life was necessary in the discharge of it. The sacred oracles are replete with injunctions to God's ministers to be holy, and to be examples to the people. Thus when God had given directions to Moses about the people in Exodus*, he gives a particular charge to the priests ; " And let the priests also, who come near to " the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord " break forth upon them." Jesus Christ having taken to himself the character of King of Israel, and the alone head and governor of his church, these were as his ministers of state, by whom he executed his commissions among men, by whom he charged to instruct the world.

Mankind in all ages have formed their ideas of a prince by those who represented his person. What opinion would that court form of a King, whose ambassadors were

men

* Exod. xix. 22.

men of no candour, no faith, no principle? who were indifferent whether their masters interest prospered, or sunk into oblivion? Surely such men would be esteemed traitors, impeached of high treason, and doomed to everlasting infamy. Much more infamous are those who take upon them the high character of the ministers of Jesus Christ, and neglect the cause of God. Nothing can be a greater contradiction in morality, nothing so gross or absurd as an immoral teacher, a preacher of righteousness, a practiser of vice; "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon." No character more odious in the sight of God; no character more justly detested by good men; nothing has a more malignant influence on religion; nothing so powerfully prevents the progress of the kingdom of Christ. This appears sufficiently evident from the vicious teachers among the Jews; particularly in that instance of Eli's sons. The sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for on account of it men abhorred the offering of the Lord. There cannot be a greater judgment upon a nation than the immorality of its public teachers. When they

they are ambitious, worldly-minded, and careless about the great concerns of eternity, it is most provoking to God, and destructive of all good order in society. The spirit of God is said to walk in the midst of the golden candlesticks; that is, the church of Christ, and her teachers, in the prophetic style, are called *stars*, to denote their knowledge of divine things, and that purity and holiness which ought to shine through the whole of their life and doctrine. But when they act inconsistently, and neglect their own souls, and those of others, the spirit, their only guide thus provoked, returns to heaven, carries with him his abused grace, and leaves the church all dark and deformed, as a ruined temple, in which he will no longer dwell. This observation is confirmed by the verse preceding my text, “ The glory of the God
 “ of Israel was gone up from the cherub
 “ whereupon he was to the threshold of the
 “ house.” The brightness of the glory of God, not his unvailed glory, which is the light of the upper temple, for that is inaccessible to mortals upon earth, but a sensible manifestation of it, comprehending in it that mercy and truth which continually
 surrounded

surrounded the throne of Jesus. This was that glory which did shine between the two cherubims above the mercy-seat, and was the distinguishing honour of the Jewish nation, and the comfort of the Jewish worshippers : This glory is that which was promised in covenant ; a glory which enlightens the dark and invigorates the dead soul.

The manner in which the glory of God departed from the temple is striking : It did not disappear all at once ; but as the declining sun gradually withdraws his light, so the divine glory departed from the cherub, then to the threshold of the door ; and at last, when they said in their hearts, they would not have this man to reign over them, it was totally extinguished. Was this the fault of the Jewish Rabbies alone ? Is the Christian ministry clear in this matter ? Have there not been, are there not still those watchmen, who are blind, ignorant, dumb dogs that cannot, or will not bark, to frighten the wolf, or awaken the sheep ? Alas ! the force of truth, and the sad experience of former ages, will extort a confession, they were not the Jewish scribes alone whose works were inconsistent with their doctrine ; they were

Were not the heathen moralists only, who taught one thing and lived another. Too many preachers of the gospel help to keep them in countenance, while their private life is a contradiction to their public lessons. O that all of us, both ministers and people, might remember our faults this day, and turn unto the Lord with our whole heart! O that all who aspire after this sacred office, might have those excellent qualifications of Apollos, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, who was fervent in spirit, courageous in the service of the gospel, eloquent and mighty in the scriptures. What he knew he zealously taught; what he did not know, he had humility enough to learn even from his inferiours.

Another vice we find charged upon the Jews, was their abuse of the Sabbath. From the beginning of the world God appropriated the seventh part of our time for his more immediate service. This is most obvious, not only from the positive institution of the Sabbath, but from all those concurring events of divine providence. In the history of that people we find them often exposed to dangers, enslaved by barbarous nations, travelling in a wilderness,

C

surrounded

furrounded by their natural enemies, and
 when planted in the land of promise, they
 were often called up to worship at Jerusa-
 lem upon the Sabbath, and obliged to leave
 their country defenceless; yet how remark-
 able is it, that as long as they performed
 their duty, and observed the divine pre-
 cept, God, as it were, bound up the hands
 of all their enemies, that not so much as a
 dog moved his tongue against them. The
 divine jealousy relative to the devout ob-
 servance of this day is abundantly evident,
 not only from the positive institution, and
 the concurring events of divine providence,
 but from those rewards and punishments
 annexed to the performance or neglect of
 their duty: “ If thou turn away thy foot
 “ from the Sabbath, from doing thy plea-
 “ sure on my holy day, and call the Sab-
 “ bath a delight, the holy of the Lord, ho-
 “ nourable, and shalt honour him, not do-
 “ ing thine own ways, nor finding thine
 “ own pleasure, nor speaking thine own
 “ words, then shalt thou delight thyself in
 “ the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride
 “ upon the high places of the earth, and
 “ feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy
 “ father, for the mouth of the Lord hath
 “ spoken

“spoken it.” But did they harken to the voice of the Lord? did they obey the precept? Alas! no: like most other things which belonged to their peace it was hid from their eyes. Nothing was such a burden to them as the Sabbath; they called it a weariness, saying, “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn; and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat.” It was a yoke which galled their necks: Those who tied up their hands from their ordinary employment had no delight in the duty, but spent the day as the sick passenger at sea every moment wishing for land. If they assembled themselves for the sanctuary service, it was that they might violate the law, and pollute that holy place; hence is that complaint of the spirit of God in * Ezekiel, “Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things; they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean; and have hid their eyes from my Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.”

Are Christians innocent in this matter?

Alas!

* Ezekiel xxii. 26.

Alas ! no : The similarity is greater, and our guilt is more aggravated in this than in all the former sins, the clear day of gospel light, with all its advantages, being added to the account. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead upon the first day of the week ; the discharge he received in our name from the Father ; and his triumph over all enemies, are events which will never drop from the minds of his true disciples, nor ever fail to animate their souls with fervent devotion, while they serve to aggravate the guilt of those who despise the Christian Sabbath.

Do not most modern Christians, so soon as they depart from the house of God, enter upon unprofitable discourse ? run to the fields to find their own pleasure, to the entire neglect of meditation and prayer in the closet, without which the word preached, or other divine institutions, will make but little impression upon the heart ? But you will tell me these are trifling offences ; but I beseech thee, O sinner, to remember this, that for those offences, which the world esteem small and trifling, more than half mankind perish everlastingly. The instances of atrocious crimes, such as self-murder, theft,

theft, and robbery, are rare, compared to covetousness, idle swearing, and a contempt of the Sabbath. Yet the sacred oracles assure us, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God, no more than the murderer or the drunkard. If the sin be small thy guilt is the greater if thou dost commit it, because the less the temptation the more easily it might have been resisted. It was an aggravation of the Traitor's crime, that he sold the Son of God for so small a price as thirty pieces of silver. Wilt thou part with an eternal God, because thou wilt not restrain thyself from a little temporary gratification upon the Sabbath: Is a little sin dearer to thee than an eternal hell will be grievous?

But if these things provoked the divine jealousy, and kindled a fire in the gates of the city of Jerusalem which could not be quenched, what has this land to dread from the sin of those who either shut themselves up on the Sabbath, in order to pursue their worldly cares and business upon that day, or those who take the alarm by the great bell, which doth summons the people of God to the place of devotion, to fly to the country to pursue every species of wickedness.

Visit the tavern, and weep, O my soul, for the silly vintner decoyed out of his all, and excluded heaven for a little worldly gain: behold in his dark chambers the clubs of drunkards, like the screech owl, flying the lovely scenes of day, that they may commit those things for which they would blush if a child saw them. “O my
 “soul, come not thou into their secret, unto
 “their assembly, mine honour, be not thou
 “united,” because they have made a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell, therefore the overflowing scourge shall pass through, saith the Lord of Hosts, and shall sweep away their refuge of lies with the besom of destruction. These remonstrances are not mere invectives, (would to God they were), but stubborn facts.

For *4thly*, Should we deny these sins, the judgments of God, their native consequences, which are already lying heavy upon us, would demonstrate to all the world, that we lied to God and our own consciences. It is well known to those who have the smallest acquaintance with the history of the Jews, that the mode of their worship, and worldly sanctuary, was exceeding glorious

rious, adapted to encourage the hope and confirm the faith of the worshipper by sensible objects ; but when the worship was corrupted, and the sanctuary profaned, nothing could be more insipid to a reasonable mind, or more provoking to a holy God. It was when Jereboam had made his calves, and set the one in Bethel, and the other in Dan, that the Lord rent the kingdom from the house of David : Then massacre and bloodshed ensued ; “ For in
 “ those days there was no peace to him
 “ that went out, nor to him that came in,
 “ but great vexations were upon all the in-
 “ habitants of the countries ; and nation
 “ was destroyed of nation, and city of ci-
 “ ty, for God did vex them with all ad-
 “ versity.” Nor is it otherwise under the Christian state, for it will always be a sacred truth, that the Lord will be with us while we are with him ; but if we forsake him, he will forsake us.

The religion of Jesus, of all others, from its glorious author and excellent nature, is wisely adapted to promote the welfare of the state, and the temporal and eternal felicity of the individual. It was to redeem men from wrath to come, and make them happy

py in the practice of this holy religion, for which Christ died; for which he arose again from the dead; for which he ascended into heaven, and soon after shewed his afflicted disciples, that though invisible to mortal eyes, he was still their omnipotent protector and benevolent guide.

If divisions prevail in the church instead of unity; if the dagon of a party-spirit usurp the throne of the Christian's heart; if Zion is in bondage; if her ordinances are barren,—these must be the effects of dreadful sins against God; and for these things should there not be great searchings of heart? If discords disgrace the great councils of the nation; if our civil war still continues; if our brethren are callous to peace and good government; if we are threatened with another powerful enemy; and what is worse than all, if we are determined to go on without retrenching our luxury, or repenting of our sins, or being anxious for the divine favour and assurance of omnipotent aid,—do we not declare our sin as Sodom? and will not the Lord say unto us, as he did unto a rebellious tribe of Israel, “Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.”

I come

I come now to the *second* head of discourse; viz. to shew that it is the duty of the people of God to mourn for the sin of their own times:

I. It was the divine will that his people should mourn for the sins of their ancestors; “ * If they confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers : If their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, then will I remember my covenant.” Nor is this without reason; we derive many advantages from our ancestors; it is but reasonable we should remember their sins against our common Parent and gracious Redeemer with remorse. Posterity are part of the same body with their ancestors; and all the mystical members of Jesus, however distant the period, however remote the climate they lived in; they are all members of the same family; they are all united by the same spirit: God will therefore have them concerned for one another; he will have them to take warning by the miscarriages of their ancestors, and to afflict their souls; that sin may appear exceeding sinful. This is abundantly evident from that instance of the annual fast, or day of atonement; on account of making and wor-

D

shipping

shipping the golden calf. The divine command was very express, "That he whose soul was not afflicted on that day should be cut off from among his people." Is it a duty then to mourn for the sins of our ancestors? much more doth it become us to bewail present guilt. This has been the practice of all the disciples of Jesus, in every age. David, a man of remarkable piety and goodness of heart, bathes his soul in tears for the sins of others. Nothing excited his aversion more than to behold men transgress the divine law: "Horror," saith he, "had taken hold of me, because of the wicked that forsake thy law. Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy statutes." Jeremiah, though he lived in a distant period, was actuated by the same spirit of grace. Love to his God, love to the souls of men, love to his country, made him weep in secret: But not content with an ordinary degree of sorrow, he cries in bitter agony of soul; "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." Time would fail me to speak of Isaiah, Nehemiah, Ezra, John Baptist, and

and others ; all of whom, like the captives in Babylon, hanged their harps upon the willows. when they remembered Zion in bondage. While a profane world shews its misery by its smiles, those heaven-born sons discover a solemn joy by their tears : It yields peace of mind, and hopes of eternal happiness. “ Blessed are they who
“ mourn ; for they shall be comforted.”

2. This was the conduct of Jesus the Saviour of the world. He became man, that he might have tears to shed for men : He had the most intense love to God, and therefore the highest sense of grief for the dishonour done unto him. Our grief and indignation at the sins of men, and the dishonour done unto the most just law of God, cannot be strong, because our nature is corrupted, and we see through a false medium. As every object appears discoloured to the distempered eye, so the depraved judgment, and the unbelieving heart of man, can neither receive the things of God, nor judge aright concerning his law. We cannot discern the holiness of the divine nature, nor the rectitude of the divine law, until we are born of the spirit of God ; and even after this supernatural change, our
iniquities

iniquities raise clouds, and darkness, that
 “ we often grop as if we had no eyes, and
 “ stumble at noon-day as in the night.” But
 the holy Jesus descended from the Father;
 he was perfectly free of all sin, had a quick
 understanding, and the ardour of his love
 to God produced in his holy soul a keen
 sensation of the smallest dishonour done to
 his law. Jesus was clad with zeal as a
 cloak, and was regardless of those wrongs
 done to his own person, in comparison of
 those pointed at his Father: “ The re-
 “ proaches of them that reproached thee
 “ are fallen upon me.” Christ pleased not
 himself when his Father was injured; but
 cheerfully submitted to the worst calum-
 nies, and death itself, to repair the disho-
 nour done the divine law, and recover the
 forfeited favour of God to man. Grief for
 sin was part of that atonement which di-
 vine justice demanded; Christ therefore
 made full satisfaction, by offering an infi-
 nite sorrow for sin, which no creature could
 do: Hence it was necessary that he should
 become a man of sorrows, and acquainted
 with grief.

Jesus was Immanuel, God with us: He
 had a double relation; one relation to God
 his

his Father, and another to man ; nor did his divine relation eclipse or destroy his human, for he was equally concerned for both. His near relation to God raised a holy emotion in his soul for the violation of his law ; and his ardent affection for man made him sigh in spirit, when he saw the obstinacy of that generation, which was an eye-witness to his miracles, and the truth of his doctrine, yet tempted Christ by demanding a sign, rather to gratify their curiosity than to confirm their faith. But the strongest affection that every human nature was capable of, may be seen in that scene in the gospel of Luke, in which the son of God is represented weeping over perishing sinners at Jerusalem. Surely next to a bleeding and dying Redeemer, this is the most affecting tragedy that ever appeared in the world. Behold the son of God entering the capital of his kingdom, amidst the acclamations of the multitude : he was deaf to their Hosannahs, and forgot himself, and all his wrongs, great and cruel as they were, and melted into tears, as it had been for the calamity of a friend or a brother : He bursted forth into the most pathetic and genuine language of undissembled

sembled grief: "Oh that thou hadst known, even that, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace!" Behold the affection of the son of God, O Christian, and do thou likewise! He is unworthy of the name of Christ, who is not affected as Christ was: none may upon good grounds call Christ their *master*, unless they imitate his graces, as well as make a profession to believe his doctrine.

3. The angels of God, according to their perfect and exalted condition, mourn for the sins of men. Those blessed spirits burn with intense love to God, and charity to man; they rejoice when God is glorified, and sinners converted. A multitude of the heavenly host was with the angel who first published the news of a Saviour, praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." Our blessed Lord confirmed this in the application of the parable of the lost sheep; "I say unto you," saith Christ, "That likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance." They rejoice at the redemption of
of

of the world through Jesus Christ, and the return of a sinner to his allegiance, because their Lord is glorified. They mourn, in proportion, for the revolt and rebellion of men, because God and his holy law is thereby dishonoured. We are told, before the angels who had a commission to sound the trumpets, and spread devastation upon the earth for the sins of men, " That there " was silence in heaven about the space of " half an hour." Those glorious stars which shine in the temple of God, and rest not day nor night to admire and praise him for his wonderful works, those stood mute, as the lamps in the silent tomb, and wondered that there was no intercessor : They anxiously waited for Jesus, the promised Deliverer, who should come out of Zion to turn away ungodliness from Jacob, that there should be no more curse. Those blessed spirits cannot behold a God so holy, so glorious, so worthy to be loved, without regret, when they see his name abused, or his authority contemned, nor can such benevolent spirits behold the destruction of man without concern. Wherefore, O Christian, seeing we are surrounded with millions of spiritual creatures that walk the earth

earth unseen, and all these have the highest concern for the glory of God, and the conversion of man, let us be so much the more concerned, as our interest is greater;

I now go on to the *third* head of discourse, which was to shew, that to mourn for the sins of others, is a duty acceptable to God.

1. It is the highest testimony of love to God. The souls of believers and Christ are united in such a strong bond of friendship, that nothing befalls the one without affecting the other: Their blessings and injuries, their joys and sorrows, are closely connected by an indissoluble union. True love is an exertion of all our powers for the interest and happiness of the person we love. The gracious soul rejoiceth in nothing so much as in the glory of God, and in the kingdom and power of Christ. Like John Baptist he is willing to decrease that Jesus may increase: Or as Jonathan, who would rather have the crown upon David's head than his own; * "Thou shalt be King over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee." Nay, this blessed union is stronger, because it is spiritual. The glory of
God,

* 1 Kings xxiii. 17.

God, and Jesus the Saviour, is dearer to the gracious soul than all other considerations: "Neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, can separate them." Moses, the meekest man upon the face of the earth, his affection and love to God was so strong, that in grief of soul he brake the tables of stone when he heard the name of God blasphemed, and saw a calf usurp the adoration due to the God of heaven. The apostle Paul declared to his weeping friends, "That he was ready not only to be bound at Jerusalem, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus." He only esteemeth God as his king, who cannot see his law broken without remorse; and he only loves Jesus in sincerity, who would prefer imprisonment to an inglorious liberty, and death rather than a prosperous life, secured by deserting the service of Jesus, and flying that post which the great Captain of his salvation hath assigned him.

2. It is the highest testimony of love to our neighbours. It shews a benevolent temper, nay a godlike disposition, to be concerned for the temporal welfare of others, and render a human being happy.

F

But

But this is only a feather laid in the scale gainst talents of gold, compared with the concerns of the soul, and eternity. It is a true love indeed for the interest of others, which produceth tears of godly sorrow for that wickedness which is the ruin of the soul, which opens the fluices of divine vengeance, which makes the judgments of God to fall on mankind. Sin is a reproach to a nation. He therefore loves his King and his country best, and what is better than all, his God, who is most concerned for that immorality which draws down the judgments of heaven upon a land: Cain manifested his enmity both to God and man, in that envy he conceived in his heart, because his brother's works were so good: Abel on the contrary demonstrated his love to God, and love to his brother, by that heart-felt grief for his works, which were so bad. It betrays much enmity to others, if we can behold them stab themselves to the heart, hear them with damnation at every word, jest with eternal flames, and run headlong into the bottomless gulf, without emitting a sigh, or dropping a tear of compassion.

3. By such a conduct we justify God
and

and his holy law. When we mourn for our own sins, and those of others, we acknowledge that the law is good and holy, and that God is righteous when he punisheth men for the transgression of it. This demonstrateth, that what is provoking to God is a grief to us, and that we delight in that which is pleasing to him: It is an evidence that we have an heart of flesh, the noblest work of God in the creature. A broken and a contrite heart is the best sacrifice, next to that of the Son of God, that can smoke upon his altar. We may mourn for our own sins, and the misconduct of our friends, merely from sinister views, because by them our worldly schemes and hopes have been disappointed, or we have been visited with sore afflictions. But when we mourn for the prevailing vice of the age we live in, whether for the church of Christ in great distress, or for the decay of vital religion, or the contempt of any one precept of the gospel, we do all in our power to repair the dishonour of God, and that reproach cast upon his most just law. Such a conduct will meet with the divine approbation; "Those that honour me I will honour," saith the Lord, "and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

But to come to the *last* general head of discourse, which was to shew, that to mourn for the sins of others is the best mean of deliverance from public calamities.

1. Those who in sincerity mourn for the sins of others are the true chosen of God, and the genuine disciples of Jesus. The divine character being impressed on their forehead; they are no more their own but bought with a price, even the precious blood of the Redeemer. This is plain from the words in my text. And will not God provide for the safety of his own? As princes and generals in those eastern countries had the names of their soldiers impressed on their foreheads to distinguish them from all others, so the Holy Spirit imprinteth a new name, as well as a new nature, upon all his children, by which they are distinguished from the world, which lieth in wickedness. This was promised in covenant, and typified in the passover, part of the blood of that sacrifice was to be sprinkled upon the doors of the houses of the Israelites, that the destroying angel might pass over those marked with blood: So the wrath of God will pass over that soul which

is

is sprinkled with the precious blood of Jesus, the true paschal lamb.

“ To him that overcometh,” saith the Spirit, “ will I give to eat of the hidden
 “ manna, and will give unto him a white
 “ stone, and in the stone a new name
 “ written, which no man knoweth, saving
 “ him that receiveth it.” Again, “ Him
 “ that overcometh will I make a pillar in
 “ the temple of my God, and he shall go no
 “ more out : And I will write upon him
 “ the name of my God, and the name of
 “ the city of my God, which is New Jeru-
 “ salem, which cometh down out of hea-
 “ ven ; and I will write upon him my new
 “ name.” These expressions plainly point
 out unto us the absolute dominion of Je-
 hovah over all his children, and their in-
 estimable privilege in being the servants of
 Jesus Christ. When God had a special com-
 mission to give, or particular favours to be-
 stow on any of his servants, to these he
 sometimes gave names before their birth ;
 such as Solomon, John the Baptist, and the
 Messiah.

But these only received it in such a sig-
 nal manner, because of the special office
 among men ; yet we are certain, that all
 who

who mourn for the sins of others in sincerity, do receive this new name, or mark, in their foreheads : And whatever relation it may bear to others, it is to themselves an infallible assurance of the divine favour and protection. The conscience being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, and the person justified, the soul is sealed with the holy spirit to the day of redemption. This is that mark upon the forehead, or seal, which the spirit of God imprinteth upon his servants. It is the name of God, their master, which is put upon them, and by this name they conquer their enemies, and overcome the world. David, when he engaged the Philistine, the enemy of God, and his people, saith, “ Thou comest to
 “ me with a sword, and with a spear, and
 “ with a shield ; but I come unto thee in
 “ the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God
 “ of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast
 “ defied.” Again, it is said of the saints that they overcame by the blood of the lamb, and the word of their testimony. By these expressions we are taught, that they who have the name of God put upon them, shall be enabled either to suffer without sin, or they shall become more than conquerors.

conquerors through Jesus Christ. How is it possible they can be overcome? God taketh his people to himself out of all nations and languages, that they may be unto him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory; and will he ever suffer any to rob him of this treasure? No: their life and happiness are secured by the life of their Redeemer: "Because I live ye shall live" also," saith Jesus.

As great men erect monuments, and pillars, and engrave their name and effigies upon them, in order to preserve their character, and perpetuate their fame, so the blessed God doth engrave his name upon his own children, that they may be the living monuments of his glorious grace. By this name God will own them at the last day, and claim them as his property. He hath engraven them upon the palms of his hands, and set them as a seal upon his heart: He will not then lose the glory of his grace and mercy, by allowing Satan, his conquered adversary, to resume his former usurpation. They may be cast into the furnace; they may suffer a little in the common calamities; but they shall not be hurt nor destroyed. That arm which
fixed

fixed the stars, and guides the planets, is stretched forth to protect the heirs of salvation, and conduct them to glory. Wherefore, O Christian, in a day of trial, when the chaff is to be fanned from the wheat, be more earnest with heaven, that the name of Jesus may be engraven as a seal upon thy heart, and the new nature implanted in thy soul. This will be a stedfast anchor of the soul, which will make her ride out all storms. This hath often made martyrs sing in the midst of flames, while spectators have melted into tears. This made Stephen shine as an angel of God, when the savage multitude rushed upon him to murder him. The glorious vision of Christ at the right hand of God, and his interest in him, caused this noble martyr to remain intrepid amidst the instruments of death; nor did the stones about his ears scarcely afflict him, when he saw his Saviour open heaven to receive him.

2. To mourn for the sins of others, is to be truly humbled under a sense of guilt, and this is a mighty bar in the way of the judgments of God. To prevent diseases by a proper regimen, is always esteemed as beneficial to mankind as medicine itself:

self: So humility is most necessary in the Christian, in order to prevent the judgments of God, which he might otherwise expect. "When men are cast down, he shall save the humble person:" On the contrary, pride is a preparative for destruction. The higher the mountain, the more it is exposed to the lightning of heaven. A proud heart, and an high look, are among those things which God hateth: "And pride," saith Solomon, "goeth before destruction: and an haughty spirit before a fall." This was one charge which God brought against the nation of the Jews in the time of Isaiah the prophet; * "Moreover the Lord saith, "Because the daughters of Zion are "haughty, and walk with stretched-forth "necks, and wanton eyes, walking, and "mincing as they go, and making a tink- "ling with their feet: Therefore the Lord "will smite with a scab the crown of the "head of the daughters of Zion, and with "all the plagues of the heathen." Pride, as it is a spiritual wickedness, so it affects the being and perfections of the glorious God more immediately than most other sins; therefore, of all others, divine ven-
F geance

* Isaiah iii. 16, 17.

geance pursueth it most hotly. The angels, those morning stars, no sooner conceived this hideous monster pride, than they were hurled down into perdition without hopes of relief. This vice is not less destructive to man : It makes him forget himself, and rob God of his glory. This is abundantly evident in that instance of Herod : His pomp and power, his wealth and grandeur, stole away his heart, and he was lifted up to his own destruction. Never is a mortal nearer his own ruin than when he forgets he is mortal. No sooner had this vain man arrogated to himself the praise due to God, than he was disgraced, and worms sent to render him a terror to himself, and a nuisance to all about him.

On the contrary, humility is the peculiar grace and ornament of a Christian. It was the first pattern Christ set before the world for imitation. Pride was the first attempt to rob God of his glory ; and Christ proposeth humility as the first duty to repay the dishonour of the divine law :
 “ For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus
 “ Christ, that though he was rich, yet for
 “ your sakes he became poor, that ye thro’
 “ his poverty might be rich.” Humility, as
 it

it was the first example of Christ's life, so it was the first lesson he taught in his doctrine: "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." Never is the human soul in a better condition to receive the lively impressions of the holy spirit, than when her towering imaginations have been cast down, and every high thought laid low in the dust. To such the Lord promiseth his grace; from such he hath promised to turn away his judgments. In that instance of Ahab, though he only put on the mask of a penitent, and rent his garments without his heart, yet the Lord, to shew us that he will even encourage an appearance of repentance, that he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, he suspended his judgments, and reserved the execution of them until the days of Joram, Ahab's son: "Seest thou," saith the Lord to the prophet, "how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

Allow me to add in the *third* place, and with this I will conclude the doctrinal part
of

of the subject, that those who mourn for the sins of others are in covenant with God. they have fled to the standard of Jesus, and have embarked in the same cause with the God of heaven. The contract on the part of God runs ; “ I will be an enemy unto
 “ thine enemies, and an adversary unto
 “ thine adversaries : for mine angel shall
 “ go before thee ; and he that toucheth
 “ thee, toucheth the apple of mine eye.” God may suffer and bear long with the sins of men, and divine patience may seem to overlook a multitude of national transgressions ; but the wrongs of his people draw down immediate vengeance : Their wounds pierce his heart, and he will speedily avenge his own elect. Divine patience tamely bore the affronts of Cain’s wicked offerings, until he added to all his former crimes the cruel murder of his brother, But no sooner were his hands stained with the innocent blood of righteous Abel, than his conscience was pierced with the arrows of death. * “ The Lord instantly met him, as
 “ a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, which
 “ made him cry in the most poignant agonies
 “ of an awakened conscience ; My punishment is greater than I can bear.” This
 bond

* Hosea xliii. 8.

bond of union is indissoluble, and mutually preserved. On the part of the true Christian it runs, “ * Do not I hate them, “ O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I “ grieved with those that rise up against “ thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred : “ I count them mine enemies.” When the soul arrives at those celestial heights of communion and intercourse with heaven, when thus united to the spirit, their interest is mutual, their joys and sorrows are reciprocal. Conscience within a man is the echo of the spirit of God, and the soul that is born from above must be deeply affected when God is dishonoured, and his spirit grieved. The soul thus united to her Maker, rejoiceth with the spirit, and mourneth with the spirit. Persons of such a heavenly frame and temper, have much happiness, and many divine promises directed to them; † “ The Lord knoweth the upright; and their inheritance shall be forever: They shall not be ashamed in the evil “ time.” When paleness of face, and trembling of knees, shall come upon the wicked; when sinners in Zion are afraid, and fearfulness surpriseth the heart of the hypocrite; they

* Psalms cxxxix. 21, 22.

† Psalms xxxvii. 18, 19.

they fear indeed, but it is a godly fear, and the source of everlasting joy. They can say, he who correcteth the nations is our Father, and our God: While he maketh his judgments to come upon the workers of iniquity, he will correct us in mercy and faithfulness. Divine justice, and truth, which are the terror of wicked men, are a shield and buckler to the godly. God may, and often doth visit the transgressions of his own people with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes: But he will not take his loving kindness from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail: He will not break his covenant, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his mouth.

I will now conclude all that hath been said with some improvement. From the foregoing premises we ought to make this natural conclusion; that if it is a duty to mourn, and be concerned for other mens sins, we should instantly prepare ourselves for the performance of it. What great reason have we to judge and condemn ourselves in this respect. When the enemy hath broken in like a flood, where is the man who hath hung his harp upon the willow? whose eyes have been a fountain
of

of tears ; who hath wept in secret, because the glory of God is departed ? Alas ! the mourners for Zion's bondage, for the decay of pure and undefiled religion, for those triumphant vices, the reproach of our land, have been very few : they have been like the gleanings of the vintage ; but sinners in Zion have multiplied like weeds in fallow ground. If we are determined to remain unconcerned for common sins, we may lay our account to be made sharers of national judgments. If we will not lay to heart to give glory to God ; if we will not repent and do our first works ; if we will not do all in our power to support the cause of Christ and his despised gospel, God will extract honour, and glory, and praise, to himself, from the ashes of our ruins.

But to be more particular : this doctrine condemns those who sport with sin, and make merry with the wrath to come. It is said by Solomon, " That fools make a mock at sin." What our translators have rendered *fools*, properly signifieth Atheists. It is a prodigious degree of wickedness indeed to sport with eternal flames ; and none but Atheists could do it. To mock, and make a jest of that which stabs the

the

the heart of God, crucified the Lord of glory, and grieves the spirit of grace, is daring beyond description. O stout-hearted sinner, how canst thou outbrave that which destroys thy immortal, and noblest part, the soul? that for which ghosts and damned spirits roar in anguish of torments. Behold what wrecks vice hath made among men! It hath stripped man of his glory, and happiness, and reduced him on a level with the beasts that perish. Take a turn among the tombs, the repositories of the dead, among coffins and worms, and behold the nauseous carcases, and tell me if thou canst seriously sport with that which is the cause of so much mischief?

There he lies mingled with dust, and half consumed with worms, who was the companion of thy frolicsome youth, and a partner of thy sins; whose ashes, could they speak, would tell thee, how bitter a thing it is to depart from the living God. Whence cometh pride, the disturber of human society? Does it spring from the corrupt fountain of the heart? From whence come wars, and famines, and pestilence, and devastations, in the world? Come they not all from sin? Is he not therefore a monster

monster of iniquity, who can view all those scenes of misery with less remorse, than he would do the fictitious stabs of an Indian prince in a tragedy. Those who eat, and drink, and make merry, when the Lord God of Hosts calls to weeping and mourning, he hath declared, that this iniquity shall not be purged from them till they die.

2. This doctrine reproveth those who make the sins of other men matter of invectives against them, instead of godly sorrow for the dishonour of the divine law, and the ruin to come upon them. It is sometimes not easy to distinguish between the love of God, and the love of ourselves. Our resentment against a man's offence, under a mask of piety towards God, and a concern for the honour of his law, will often be found to be nothing else than that old leaven of self-love ; a desire of revenge, and a hatred to the person sinning ; than which nothing can be more odious in the eyes of a pure and heart-searching God. The disciples of our Lord, from an indiscreet zeal, were ready to cry for fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans, when they refused to receive Christ. This

might have been thought a generous concern for the honour of their Master ; but Jesus, who knew that their zeal proceeded rather from the natural aversion they had to the Samaritans, than the genuine love of God, turned, and rebuked them, and said, “ Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.” We must therefore, carefully distinguish between the sin and the sinner ; and, though we are bound by the love of God to hate the thing, we are bound by the same law to love the person, who is our neighbour. They stand condemned by the law who lament not its transgression, from the purest motives of love to the law-maker, and grieve not for the criminal, from fervent love to their neighbour.

3. We may bring to the same bar, and condemn those who, instead of mourners, are imitators of common sins. These add fuel to the general corruption, as if the glory of God, and the honour of his law, were not sufficiently eclipsed : as if men were too slow to trample upon the divine authority, too unrelenting in their attacks to dethrone the King Eternal. It is a glorious virtue to be heartily grieved for the
sins

sins of the world, and not to be fettered with the love of them. We find one great crime of Israel was, they spared those nations which the Lord had devoted to destruction; and then they were mingled among them, and learned their works. Happy are they who can relieve the patient, without being infected with the distemper. O happy soul! who canst be heartily grieved for the dishonour of Christ; and who dost all in thy power to reclaim the wicked without a desire of mingling with them, or of partaking of their sins.

Again, from what hath been said, the children of God may know how to conduct themselves in time of trial, and where to find protection in the greatest danger. Their defence is the munition of rocks; their duty is to fly unto Jehovah, as doves to their windows, or as the cloudy vapour before the wind. Divine vengeance is suspended over these God-provoking lands, some drops of his wrath are already fallen, and there is a sound of more: "Come my people, therefore," saith the Lord, "enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were for a little

“ little moment, until the indignation be
 “ over-past.” The glorious perfections of
 God in Christ, are to believers chambers of
 communion, and walls of Salvation. They
 who enter in through Jesus Christ, who is
 the door, shall never perish. They who
 build upon this rock shall never be moved.
 “ This is the God-man, who shall be as an
 “ hiding place to his people from the wind,
 “ and a covert from the tempest ; as rivers
 “ of water in a dry place ; as the shadow of
 “ a great rock in a weary land.” Let the
 children of Zion, therefore, be joyful in Christ
 their King : Let them know their privilege,
 who are the faithful witnesses of Jesus a-
 gainst all those abominations done in the
 world. “ Behold,” saith Christ, “ I set
 “ before you an open door,” Accept of
 the invitation ; fly to the divine protection,
 as Noah did into the ark when the waters
 came upon the earth.

2. Let reformation begin at home. True
 faith looketh upon Christ, whom we have
 pierced, and gives us a proper view of the
 nature and demerit of sin. It maketh a
 man abhor himself and mourn ; it search-
 eth the hidden things of the heart ; it pulls
 down

down those strong holds which sin hath raised against Christ in the soul. Without this personal reformation, whatever we may say or do for the reformation of others, will be no more acceptable to a pure heart-searching God, than if we would slay a man, or cut off a dog's neck. Private devotion, in time of danger, not only calms that flutter of spirits which is apt to arise in weak minds, but it abates that burning thirst which many have after the honours, the pleasures, and profits of the world ; it turns their thoughts upon a future state, and convinces more and more of the folly of a man's putting his trust in any thing but in the living God. Therefore, O my friends ! let me be importunate with you to look into yourselves, and lay hold of Jesus Christ. If you do this, God will either hide you from the storms of the world, or secure you in heaven. Why gaddest thou about, O Christian, with the children of Babylon ? Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord. Let that storm which disperfeth others, bring you home to God ; make you enter your closet with more eagerness, and render your communion

nion with Jesus Christ more stedfast and uniform. Remain not abroad in the fields of Satan, least, like the Egyptians, the storms of divine vengeance overtake you, and you be crushed under the hailstones of God's wrath.

Lastly, Be much concerned for the souls of other men ; do all you can to save them from ruin. In a declining state it is but little we can do, but we may always lend them our prayers, and who knows but God may hear, and turn from the fierceness of his wrath. Before the destruction of Sodom, the angels commanded Lot to go out and warn his friends, and bring all with him he could persuade. If you prove unsuccessful, you will at least free your own souls from the common guilt ; “ For
“ if you warn the wicked, and he turn not
“ from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity ; but
“ thou shalt deliver thy soul.”

Besides, by such a conduct thou dost imitate thy divine Master. Jesus Christ went about continually doing good in his lifetime to the souls and bodies of men, and at last died a most painful death to save them,

them from ruin ; and the promise of deliverance from danger in the text, is only to those who sigh and cry for the sins of others : “ And the Lord said unto him, Go
 “ thro’ the midst of the city, through the
 “ midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon
 “ the foreheads of the men that sigh, and
 “ that cry for all the abominations that be
 “ done in the midst thereof.” AMEN.

F I N I S.

from the main; and the promise of life
is extended to all in the same way
to those who fight and cry for the master
of the world. And the Lord said unto him, O
son of man, the mind of the city, through the
city of Jerusalem, and for a mark upon
the forehead of the men that fight, and
they shall not be the reproaches that he
shall make of them in the day of wrath.

4 OCT 58

